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INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMCONSUL MADRAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 00158

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR
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SUBJECT: GOI OFFICIAL ON STRENGTH OF LTTE

REF: NEW DELHI 102

1. CONFIDENTIAL ENTIRE TEXT.

2. REFTEL (MFA UNDERSECRETARY FOR SRI LANKA'S COMMENTS ON LATEST IPKF TROOP WITHDRAWAL) PRESENTS AN INTERESTING SNAPSHOT OF CURRENT SOUTH BLOCK THINKING ON SITUATION IN NORTHEASTERN PROVINCE.

3. ON THE ROLE OF LTTE, HOWEVER, THE WORKING-LEVEL INDIAN HIGH COMMISSION OFFICIAL WHO DEALS MOST CLOSELY WITH ALL ASPECTS OF INDIA'S ROLE IN NORTHEASTERN PROVINCE, DR. S. JAISHANKAR, PRESENTS A SOMEWHAT MORE SOBER VIEW OF CURRENT STRENGTH OF THE LTTE. HE SAYS THAT THE LTTE HAS BEEN OUTMANEUVERED IN THE EAST AND IS NO LONGER OF MUCH IMPORTANCE THERE. BUT HE TOLD POLCOUNS JAN 6 THAT THERE ARE PROBABLY STILL 2000-3000 TIGERS IN THE OLD NORTHERN PROVINCE, IN WANNI AREA SOUTH OF ELEPHANT PASS, AND THAT THEY CAN CONTINUE TO ELUDE IPKF. JAISHANKAR SAID THAT A STEADY (ALBEIT SMALLER THAN PRE-JULY 1987) STREAM OF WEAPONS STILL COME ACROSS THE PALK STRAIT TO THE TIGERS, AND DENIED THAT THE SECURITY OFFICIALS IN TAMIL NADU WERE CAPABLE OF MORE THAN marginally AFFECTING THIS TRAFFIC, WHICH HE POINTED OUT, DREW ON TIES BETWEEN FISHING/SMUGGLING COMMUNITIES WHICH DATE BACK A HUNDRED YEARS. HE EXPRESSED SOME CONCERN ABOUT WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO SUPPORT FOR THE LTTE IN TAMIL NADU IF THE DMK WERE TO WIN IN THE JANUARY 21 ELECTION.

4. THE INDIANS SEE THE FEB 15 GENERAL ELECTION HERE AS A REAL TEST OF STRENGTH IN WHAT USED TO BE NORTHERN PROVINCE, PARTICULARLY IN JAFFNA PENINSULA WHERE THE LTTE CONTINUES TO EXERT SOME POLITICAL FORCE EVEN THOUGH ABLE TO DO ALMOST NOTHING MILITARILY. JAISHANKAR SAID THAT IPKF WILL GO ALL OUT TO HELP ENSURE A BIG TURNOUT IN THAT ELECTION SINCE THE INDIANS EXPECT THE LTTE TO CONTINUE TO SUPPORT A BOYCOTT OF THE POLLS. HE IMPLIED THAT THE GOI WOULD VIEW A 65 PER CENT TURNOUT IN JAFFNA PENINSULA AS A REAL VICTORY FOR HIS SIDE BUT REFUSED TO SPECULATE WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THE TURNOUT WERE LOW.

SPAIN